

Graham  
Greene



The  
Ministry  
of Fear



2394

PENGUIN BOOKS  
THE MINISTRY OF FEAR

Graham Greene was born in 1904 and educated at Berkhamsted School, where his father was the headmaster. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, where he published a book of verse, he worked for four years as a sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, which he classed as an 'entertainment' in order to distinguish it from more serious work. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and he was commissioned to visit Mexico in 1938 and report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, *The Power and the Glory*.

*Brighton Rock* was published in 1938 and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was sent out to Sierra Leone in 1941-3. One of his major post-war novels, *The Heart of the Matter*, is set in West Africa and is considered by many to be his finest book. This was followed by *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, a story set in Vietnam, *Our Man in Havana*, and *A Burnt-Out Case*. His novel, *The Comedians*, has been filmed, and in 1967 he published a collection of short stories under the title: *May We Borrow Your Husband?* Among his latest publications are his autobiography, *A Sort of Life* (1971), *The Honorary Consul* (1973), *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (1974), *An Impossible Woman: The Memoirs of Dottoressa Moor of Capri* (edited 1975) and *The Human Factor* (1978).

In all Graham Greene has written some thirty novels, 'entertainments', plays, children's books, travel books, and collections of essays and short stories. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966.

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GRAHAM GREENE

THE MINISTRY  
OF FEAR

AN ENTERTAINMENT



PENGUIN BOOKS  
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William Heinemann Ltd

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England  
Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, U.S.A.  
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia  
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4  
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

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First published by William Heinemann Ltd 1943  
Published in Penguin Books 1963  
Reprinted 1965, 1968, 1970, 1972  
Reset and reprinted from the Collected Edition 1974  
Reprinted 1975, 1976, 1978

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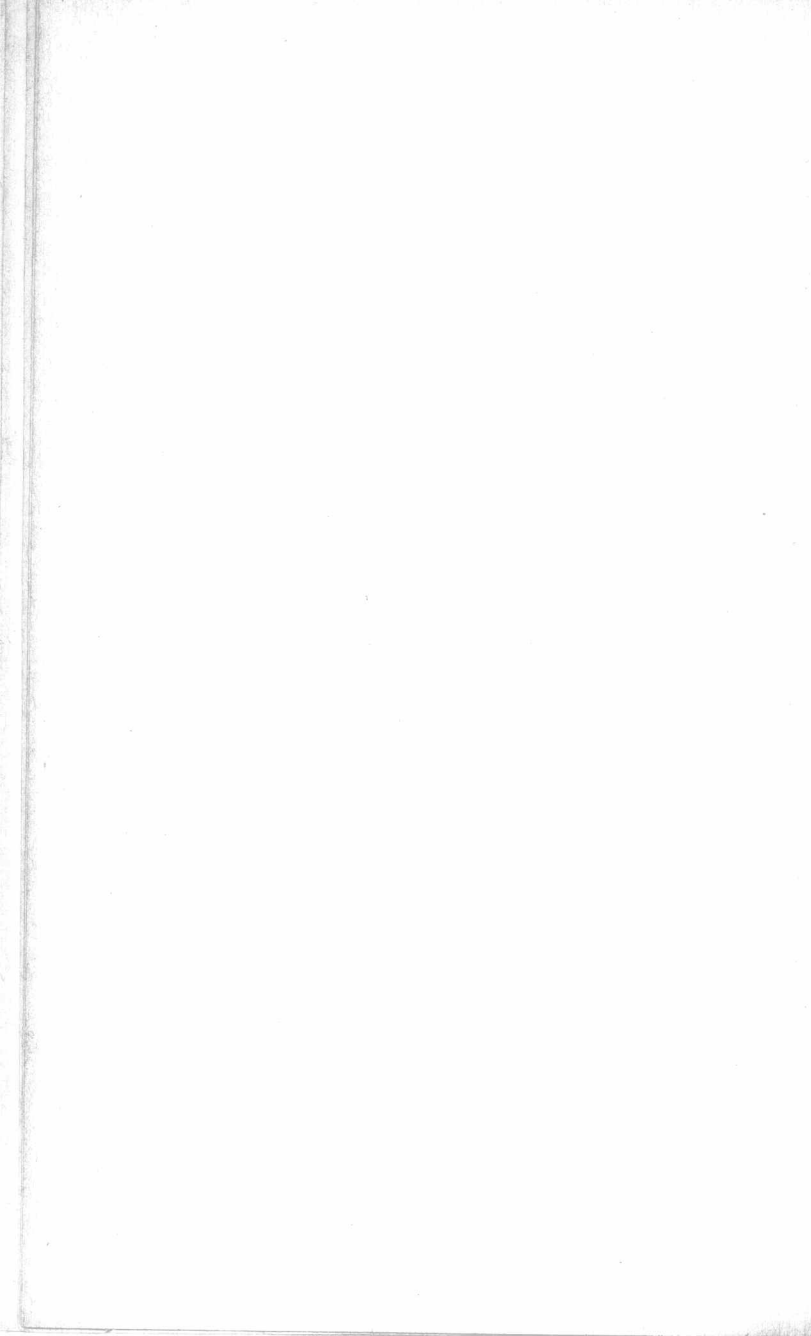


*'Have they brought home the haunch?'*

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

*The Little Duke*





BOOK ONE

*The Unhappy Man*



## Chapter 1

### THE FREE MOTHERS

'None passes without warrant.'

*The Little Duke*

#### 1

THERE was something about a fête which drew Arthur Rowe irresistibly, bound him a helpless victim to the distant blare of a band and the knock-knock of wooden balls against coconuts. Of course this year there were no coconuts because there was a war on: you could tell that too from the untidy gaps between the Bloomsbury houses – a flat fireplace half-way up a wall, like the painted fireplace in a cheap dolls' house, and lots of mirrors and green wall-papers, and from round a corner of the sunny afternoon the sound of glass being swept up, like the lazy noise of the sea on a shingled beach. Otherwise the square was doing its very best with the flags of the free nations and a mass of bunting which had obviously been preserved by somebody ever since the Jubilee.

Arthur Rowe looked wistfully over the railings – there were still railings. The fête called him like innocence: it was entangled in childhood, with vicarage gardens and girls in white summer frocks and the smell of herbaceous borders and security. He had no inclination to mock at these elaborately naïve ways of making money for a cause. There was the inevitable clergyman presiding over a rather timid game of chance; an old lady in a print dress that came down to her ankles and a floppy garden hat hovered officially, but with excitement, over a treasure-hunt (a little plot of ground like a child's garden was staked out with claims), and as the evening darkened – they would have to close early because of the blackout – there would be some energetic work with trowels. And there in a corner, under a plane tree, was the fortune-teller's booth – unless it was an impromptu outside lavatory. It all seemed perfect in the late summer Sunday afternoon. 'My peace I give unto you. Not as the world knoweth peace

... ' Arthur Rowe's eyes filled with tears, as the small military band they had somehow managed to borrow struck up again a faded song of the last war: *Whate'er befall I'll oft recall that sunlit mountainside.*

Pacing round the railings he came towards his doom: pennies were rattling down a curved slope on to a chequer-board – not very many pennies. The fête was ill-attended; there were only three stalls and people avoided those. If they had to spend money they would rather try for a dividend – of pennies from the chequer-board or savings-stamps from the treasure-hunt. Arthur Rowe came along the railings, hesitantly, like an intruder, or an exile who has returned home after many years and is uncertain of his welcome.

He was a tall stooping lean man with black hair going grey and a sharp narrow face, nose a little twisted out of the straight and a too sensitive mouth. His clothes were good but gave the impression of being uncared for; you would have said a bachelor if it had not been for an indefinable married look . . .

'The charge,' said the middle-aged lady at the gate, 'is a shilling, but that doesn't seem quite fair. If you wait another five minutes you can come in at the reduced rate. I always feel it's only right to warn people when it gets as late as this.'

'It's very thoughtful of you.'

'We don't want people to feel cheated – even in a good cause, do we?'

'I don't think I'll wait, all the same. I'll come straight in. What exactly is the cause?'

'Comforts for free mothers – I mean mothers of the free nations.'

Arthur Rowe stepped joyfully back into adolescence, into childhood. There had always been a fête about this time of the year in the vicarage garden, a little way off the Trumpington Road, with the flat Cambridgeshire field beyond the extemporized bandstand, and at the end of the fields the pollarded willows by the stickleback stream and the chalk-pit on the slopes of what in Cambridgeshire they call a hill. He came to these fêtes every year with an odd feeling of excite-

## THE FREE MOTHERS

ment – as if anything might happen, as if the familiar pattern of life that afternoon might be altered for ever. The band beat in the warm late sunlight, the brass quivered like haze, and the faces of strange young women would get mixed up with Mrs Troup, who kept the general store and post office, Miss Savage the Sunday School teacher, the publicans' and the clergy's wives. When he was a child he would follow his mother round the stalls – the baby clothes, the pink woollies, the art pottery, and always last and best the white elephants. It was always as though there might be discovered on the white elephant stall some magic ring which would give three wishes or the heart's desire, but the odd thing was that when he went home that night with only a second-hand copy of *The Little Duke*, by Charlotte M. Yonge, or an out-of-date atlas advertising Mazawattee tea, he felt no disappointment: he carried with him the sound of brass, the sense of glory, of a future that would be braver than today. In adolescence the excitement had a different source; he imagined he might find at the vicarage some girl whom he had never seen before, and courage would touch his tongue, and in the late evening there would be dancing on the lawn and the smell of stocks. But because these dreams had never come true there remained the sense of innocence . . .

And the sense of excitement. He couldn't believe that when he had passed the gate and reached the grass under the plane trees nothing would happen, though now it wasn't a girl he wanted or a magic ring, but something far less likely – to mislay the events of twenty years. His heart beat and the band played, and inside the lean experienced skull lay childhood.

'Come and try your luck, sir?' said the clergyman in a voice which was obviously baritone at socials.

'If I could have some coppers.'

'Thirteen for a shilling, sir.'

Arthur Rowe slid the pennies one after the other down the little inclined groove and watched them stagger on the board.

'Not your lucky day, sir, I'm afraid. What about another shilling's-worth? Another little flutter in a good cause?'

'I think perhaps I'll flutter further on.' His mother, he

remembered, had always fluttered further on, carefully dividing her patronage in equal parts, though she left the coconuts and the gambling to the children. At some stalls it had been very difficult to find anything at all, even to give away to the servants . . .

Under a little awning there was a cake on a stand surrounded by a small group of enthusiastic sightseers. A lady was explaining, 'We clubbed our butter rations – and Mr Tatham was able to get hold of the currants.'

She turned to Arthur Rowe and said, 'Won't you take a ticket and guess its weight?'

He lifted it and said at random, 'Three pounds five ounces.'

'A very good guess, I should say. Your wife must have been teaching you.'

He winced away from the group. 'Oh no, I'm not married.'

War had made the stall-holders' task extraordinarily difficult: second-hand Penguins for the Forces filled most of one stall, while another was sprinkled rather than filled with the strangest second-hand clothes – the cast-offs of old age – long petticoats with pockets, high lacy collars with bone supports, routed out of Edwardian drawers and discarded at last for the sake of the free mothers, and corsets that clanked. Baby clothes played only a very small part now that wool was rationed and the second-hand was so much in demand among friends. The third stall was the traditional one – the white elephant – though black might have described it better since many Anglo-Indian families had surrendered their collections of ebony elephants. There were also brass ash-trays, embroidered match-cases which had not held matches now for a very long time, books too shabby for the bookstall, two post-card albums, a complete set of Dickens cigarette-cards, an electro-plated egg-boiler, a long pink cigarette-holder, several embossed boxes for pins from Benares, a signed post-card of Mrs Winston Churchill, and a plateful of mixed foreign copper coins . . . Arthur Rowe turned over the books and found with an ache of the heart a dingy copy of *The Little Duke*. He paid sixpence for it and walked on. There was something threatening, it seemed to him, in the very perfection of the day.

Between the plane trees which shaded the treasure-ground he could see the ruined section of the square; it was as if Providence had led him to exactly this point to indicate the difference between then and now. These people might have been playing a part in an expensive morality for his sole benefit . . .

He couldn't, of course, not take part in the treasure-hunt, though it was a sad declension to know the nature of the prize, and afterwards there remained nothing of consequence but the fortune-teller – it was a fortune-teller's booth and not a lavatory. A curtain made of a cloth brought home by somebody from Algiers dangled at the entrance. A lady caught his arm and said, 'You must. You really must. Mrs Bellairs is quite wonderful. She told my son . . .' and clutching another middle-aged lady as she went by, she went breathlessly on, 'I was just telling this gentleman about wonderful Mrs Bellairs and my son.'

'Your younger son?'

'Yes. Jack.'

The interruption enabled Rowe to escape. The sun was going down: the square garden was emptying: it was nearly time to dig up the treasure and make tracks, before darkness and blackout and siren-time. So many fortunes one had listened to, behind a country hedge, over the cards in a liner's saloon, but the fascination remained even when the fortune was cast by an amateur at a garden fête. Always, for a little while, one could half-believe in the journey overseas, in the strange dark woman, and the letter with good news. Once somebody had refused to tell his fortune at all – it was just an act, of course, put on to impress him – and yet that silence had really come closer to the truth than anything else.

He lifted the curtain and felt his way in.

It was very dark inside the tent and he could hardly distinguish Mrs Bellairs, a bulky figure shrouded in what looked like cast-off widow's weeds – or perhaps it was some kind of peasant's costume. He was unprepared for Mrs Bellairs' deep powerful voice: a convincing voice. He had expected the wavering tones of a lady whose other hobby was water-colours.



'Sit down, please, and cross my hand with silver.'

'It's so dark.'

But now he could just manage to make her out: it was a peasant's costume with a big head-dress and a veil of some kind tucked back over her shoulder. He found a half-crown and sketched a cross upon her palm.

'Your hand.'

He held it out and felt it gripped firmly as though she intended to convey: expect no mercy. A tiny electric night-light was reflected down on the girdle of Venus, the little crosses which should have meant children, the long, long line of life . . .

He said, 'You're up-to-date. The electric nightlight, I mean.'

She paid no attention to his flippancy. She said, 'First the character, then the past: by law I am not allowed to tell the future. You're a man of determination and imagination and you are very sensitive - to pain, but you sometimes feel you have not been allowed a proper scope for your gifts. You want to do great deeds, not dream them all day long. Never mind. After all, you have made one woman happy.'

He tried to take his hand away, but she held it too firmly: it would have been a tug of war. She said, 'You have found the true contentment in a happy marriage. Try to be more patient, though. Now I will tell you your past.'

He said quickly, 'Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future.'

It was as if he had pressed a button and stopped a machine. The silence was odd and unexpected. He hadn't hoped to silence her, though he dreaded what she might say, for even inaccuracies about things which are dead can be as painful as the truth. He pulled his hand again and it came away. He felt awkward sitting there with his hand his own again.

Mrs Bellairs said, 'My instructions are these. What you want is the cake. You must give the weight as four pounds eight and a half ounces.'

'Is that the right weight?'

'That's immaterial.'

He was thinking hard and staring at Mrs Bellairs' left hand which the light caught: a square ugly palm with short blunt